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| **The Story of Erinoid submitted by Special Agent Rupert Radcliffe** In 1908 a new type of plastic made from casein, a protein found in milk, was invented by Victor Schutz, a Latvian chemist. It was made from milk curd, a by-product of the dairy industry. Soon after its invention, the company Syrolit Ltd obtained a licence to produce casein. In 1911, it moved from Enfield, Middlesex, to the former cloth mills at Lightpill. The new site was nearer to the supply of milk curd from Ireland.Despite refrigeration the company met with serious difficulties in keeping the wet curd in a workable condition. The problem was solved when E.A. Petersen, a German who had worked in the production of casein in Hamburg, introduced a new 'dry' process. This used casein granules instead of starting with milk or curd. The new product was registered in 1913 as 'Erinoid'.In May 1914 Petersen was appointed Works Manager and took control of production at Lightpill. By October the first Erinoid product appeared and became the main source of casein plastic outside Germany. German imports ceased with the outbreak of war in July 1914. There was a huge demand for Erinoid, especially from British button manufacturers. During 1914 production of Erinoid increased and the workforce at Lightpill grew from 25 to 125 employees.Erinoid offered manufacturers new and exciting applications. The material was supplied in sheets, rods, tubes and discs. It was non-flammable, odourless and did not conduct electricity. It could be sawn, drilled, glued and turned like wood. Dyed in a wide range of colours, it provided a cheap substitute for many expensive materials such as ivory, amber, horn, tortoiseshell, coral, ebony and bone.As well as buttons early applications included knitting needles, fountain pens and instrument panels. It provided an ideal substitute for ivory piano keys.Erinoid Ltd continued to develop new types of plastics. These included cellulose acetate, PVC and polystyrene.Although the company was taken over in 1957, plastics continued to be made at Lightpill into the early 1980s. |